



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE VALUE OF GREECE TO THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD

By PROFESSOR GILBERT MURRAY, Oxford University

## PART I

IF the value of man's life on earth is to be measured in dollars and miles and horse-power, ancient Greece must count as a poverty-stricken and a minute territory; its engines and implements were nearer to the spear and bow of the savage than to our own telegraph and aeroplane. Even if we neglect merely material things and take as our standard the actual achievements of the race in conduct and in knowledge, the average clerk who goes to town daily, idly glancing at his morning newspaper, is probably a better behaved and infinitely better informed person than the average Athenian who sat spellbound at the tragedies of Æschylus. It is only by the standard of the spirit, to which the thing achieved is little and the quality of mind that achieved it much, which cares less for the sum of knowledge attained than for the love of knowledge, less for much good policing than for one free act of heroism, that the great age of Greece can be judged as something extraordinary and unique in value.

By this standard, if it is a legitimate and reasonable one to apply, we shall be able to understand why classical Greek literature was the basis of education throughout all later antiquity; why its re-discovery, however fragmentary and however imperfectly understood, was able to intoxicate the keenest minds of Europe and constitute a kind of spiritual "Re-birth," and how its further and further exploration may be still a task worth men's spending their lives upon and capable of giving mankind guidance as well as inspiration.

But is such a standard legitimate and reasonable? We shall gain nothing by unanalyzed phrases. But I think surely it is merely the natural standard of any philosophical historian. Suppose it is argued that an average optician at the present day knows more optics than Roger Bacon, the inventor of spectacles; suppose it is argued that therefore he is, as far as optics go, a greater man, and that Roger Bacon has nothing to teach us; what is the answer? It is, I suppose, that Roger Bacon, receiving a certain amount of knowledge from his teachers, had that in him which turned it to unsuspected directions and made it immensely greater and more fruitful. The average optician has probably added a little to what he was taught, but not much, and has doubtless forgotten or confused a good deal. So that, if by studying Roger Bacon's life or his books we could get into touch with his mind and acquire some of that special moving and inspiring quality of his, it would help us far more than would the mere knowledge of the optician.

This truth is no doubt hard to see in the case of purely technical science; in books of wider range, such as Darwin's for instance, it is easy for any reader to feel the presence of a really great mind, producing inspiration of a different sort from that of the most excellent up-to-date examination text-book. In philosophy, religion, poetry and the highest kinds of art, the greatness of the author's mind

seems as a rule to be all that matters; one almost ignores the date at which he worked. This is because in technical sciences the element of mere fact, or mere knowledge, is so enormous, the elements of imagination, character and the like so very small. Hence, books on science, in a progressive age, very quickly become "out of date," and each new edition usually supersedes the last. It is the rarest thing for a work of science to survive as a text-book more than ten years or so. Newton's *Principia* is almost an isolated instance among modern writings.

Yet there are some few such books. Up till about the year 1900 the elements of geometry were regularly taught, throughout Europe, in a text-book written by a Greek called Eukleides in the third or second century B. C. That text-book lasted over two thousand years. Now, of course, people have discovered a number of faults in Euclid, but it has taken them all that time to do it.

Again, I knew an old gentleman who told me that, at a good English school, in the early nineteenth century, he had been taught the principles of grammar out of a writer called Dionysius Thrax, or Denis of Thrace. Denis was a Greek of the first century B. C., who made or carried out the remarkable discovery that there was such a thing as a science of grammar, *i. e.*, that men in their daily speech were unconsciously obeying an extraordinary and subtle and intricate body of laws, which were capable of being studied and reduced to order. Denis did not make the whole discovery himself; he was led to it by his master Aristarchos and others. And his book had been re-edited several times in the nineteen-hundred odd years before this old gentleman was taught it.

To take a third case: all through later antiquity and the middle ages the science of medicine was based on the writings of two ancient doctors Hippocrates and Galen. Galen was a Greek who lived at Rome in the early Empire, Hippocrates a Greek who lived at the island of Cos in the fifth century B. C. A great part of the history of modern medicine is a story of emancipation from the dead hand of these great ancients. But one little treatise attributed to Hippocrates was in active use in the training of medical students in my own day in Scotland and is still in use in some American Universities. It was the Oath taken by medical students in the classic age of Greece when they solemnly faced the duties of their profession. The disciple swore to honor and obey his teacher and care for his children if ever they were in need; always to help his patients to the best of his power; never to use or profess to use magic or charms or any supernatural means; never to supply poison or perform illegal operations; never to abuse the special position of intimacy which a doctor naturally obtains in a sick house, but always on entering to remember that he goes as a friend and helper to every individual in it.

We have given up that oath now: I suppose we do not believe so much in the value of oaths. The

man who first drew up that oath did a great deed. He realized and defined the meaning of his high calling in words which doctors of unknown tongues and undiscovered countries accepted from him and felt to express their aims for well over two thousand years.

Now what do I want to illustrate by these three instances? The rapidity with which we are now at last throwing off the last vestiges of the yoke of Greece? No, not that. I want to point out that even in the realm of science, where progress is so swift and books so short-lived, the Greeks of the great age had such genius and vitality that their books lived in a way that no others have lived. Let us get away from the thought of Euclid as an inky and imperfect English schoolbook, to that ancient Eukleides who, with exceedingly few books but a large table of sand let into the floor, planned and discovered and put together and re-shaped the first laws of geometry, till at last he had written one of the great simple books of the world, a book which should stand a pillar and beacon to mankind long after all the political world that Eukleides knew had been swept away and the kings he served were conquered by the Romans, and the Romans in course of time conquered by the barbarians, and the barbarians themselves, with much labor and reluctance, partly by means of Eukleides' book eventually educated; so that at last, in our own day, they can manage to learn their geometry without it. The time has come for Euclid to be superseded; let him go. He has surely held the torch for mankind long enough; and books of science are born to be superseded. What I want to suggest is that the same extraordinary vitability of mind which made Hippocrates and Euclid and even Denys of Thrace last their two thousand years, was also put by the Greeks of the great age into those activities which are, for the most part at any rate, not perishable or progressive but eternal.

This is a simple point, but it is so important that we must dwell on it for a moment. If we read an old treatise on medicine or mechanics, we may admire it and feel it a work of genius, but we also feel that it is obsolete: its work is over; we have got beyond it. But when we read Homer or Æschylus, if once we have the power to admire and understand their writing, we do not for the most part have any feeling of having got beyond them. We have done so no doubt in all kinds of minor things, in general knowledge, in details of technique in civilization and the like; but hardly any sensible person ever imagines that he has got beyond their essential quality, the quality that has made them great.

Doubtless there is in every art an element of mere knowledge or science and that element is progressive. But there is another element, too, which does not depend on knowledge and which does not progress but has a kind of stationary and eternal value, like the beauty of the dawn, or the love of a mother for her child, or the joy of a young animal in being alive, or the courage of a martyr facing torment. We cannot for all our progress get beyond these things; there they stand, like light upon the mountains. The only question is whether we can rise to them. And it is the same with all the greatest births of human imagination. As far as

we can speculate, there is not the faintest probability of any poet ever setting to work on, let us say, the essential effect aimed at by Æschylus in the Cassandra-scene of the "Agamemnon," and doing it better than Æschylus. The only thing which the human race has to do with that scene is to understand it and get out of it all the joy and emotion and wonder that it contains.

This eternal quality is perhaps clearest in poetry: in poetry the mixture of knowledge matters less. In art there is a constant development of tools and media and technical processes: The modern artist can feel that, though he cannot, perhaps, make as good a statue as Pheidias, he could at any rate here and there have taught Pheidias something: and at any rate he can try his art on subjects far more varied and more stimulating to his imagination. In philosophy the mixture is more subtle and more profound. Philosophy always depends in some sense upon science, yet the best philosophy seems generally to have in it some eternal quality of creative imagination. Plato wrote a dialogue about the constitution of the world, the Timæus, which was highly influential in later Greece, but seems to us with our vastly superior scientific knowledge almost nonsensical. Yet when Plato writes about the theory of knowledge or the ultimate meaning of Justice or of Love, no good philosopher can afford to leave him aside: the chief question is whether we can rise to the height and subtlety of his thought.

And here another point emerges, equally simple and equally important if we are to understand our relation to the past. Suppose a man says: "I quite understand that Plato or Æschylus may have had fine ideas, but surely anything of value which they said must long before this have become common property. There is no need to go back to the Greeks for it. We do not go back and read Copernicus to learn that the earth goes round the sun. What is the answer? It is that such a view ignores exactly this difference between the progressive and the eternal, between knowledge and imagination. If Harvey discovers that the blood is not stationary but circulates, if Copernicus discovers that the earth goes round the Sun and not the Sun round the Earth, those discoveries can easily be communicated in the most abbreviated form. If a mechanic invents an improvement on the telephone, or a social reformer puts some good usage in the place of a bad one, in a few years we will probably all be using the improvement without even knowing what it is or saying Thank you. We may be as stupid as we like, we have in a sense got the good of it.

But can one apply the same process to *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*? Can any one tell us in a few words what they come to? Or can a person get the good of them in any way except one—the way of vivid and loving study following and feeling the author's meaning all through? To suppose, as I believe some people do, that you can get the value of a great poem by studying an abstract of it in an encyclopedia or by reading cursorily an average translation of it, argues really a kind of mental deficiency, like deafness or color-blindness. The things that we have called eternal, the things of the spirit and the imagination, always seem to lie more in a process than in a result, and can only be reached and enjoyed by somehow going through the process again. If the value of a particular walk lies in the scenery,

you do not get that value by taking a short cut or using a fast motor car.

In looking back, then, upon any vital and significant age of the past we shall find objects of two kinds. First, there will be things like the Venus of Milo or the *Book of Job* or Plato's *Republic*, which are interesting or precious in themselves, because of their own inherent qualities; secondly, there will be things like the Roman code of the Twelve Tables or the invention of the printing-press or the record of certain great battles, which are interesting chiefly because they are causes of other and greater things or from knots in the great web of history—the first having artistic interest, the second only historical interest, though, of course, it is obvious that in any concrete case there is generally a mixture of both.

Now ancient Greece is important in both ways. For the artist or poet it has in a quite extraordinary degree the quality of beauty. For instance, to take a contrast with Rome: If you dig about the Roman Wall in Cumberland you will find quantities of objects, altars, inscriptions, figurines, weapons, boots and shoes, which are full of historic interest but are not any more beautiful than the contents of any modern rubbish heap. And the same is true of most excavations all over the world. But if you dig at any classical or sub-classical site in the Greek world, however unimportant historically, practically every object you find will be beautiful. The wall itself will be beautiful; the inscriptions will be beautifully cut; the figurines, however cheap and simple, may have some intentional grotesques among them but the rest will have a special truthfulness and grace; the vases will be of good shapes and the patterns will be beautiful patterns. If you happen to dig in a burying-place and come across some epitaphs on the dead, they will practically all—even when the verses do not quite scan and the words are wrongly spelt—have about them this inexplicable touch of beauty.

I am anxious not to write nonsense about this. One could prove the point in detail by taking any collection of Greek epitaphs, and that is the only way in which it can be proved. The beauty is a fact, and if we try to analyze the sources of it we shall perhaps in part understand how it has come to pass.

In the first place, it is not a beauty of ornament; it is a beauty of structure, a beauty of rightness and simplicity. Compare an athlete in flannels playing tennis and a stout dignitary smothered in gold robes. Or compare a good modern yacht, swift, lithe and plain, with a lumbering heavily gilded sixteenth century galleon, or even with a Chinese state junk: the yacht is far the more beautiful though she has not a hundredth part of the ornament. It is she herself that is beautiful, because her lines and structure are right. The others are essentially clumsy and, therefore, ugly things, dabbled over with gold and paint. Now ancient Greek things for the most part have the beauty of the yacht. The Greeks used paint a good deal, but apart from that a Greek temple is almost as plain as a shed: people accustomed to arabesques and stained glass and gargoyles can very often see nothing in it. A Greek statue has as a rule no ornament at all: a young man racing or praying, an old man thinking, there it stands expressed in a stately and simple convention, true or false, the anatomy and the surfaces right or wrong, aiming at no beauty except the truest. It would

probably seem quite dull to the maker of a medieval wooden figure of a king which I remember seeing in a town in the East of Europe: a crown blazing with many-colored glass, a long crimson robe covered with ornaments and beneath an idiot face, no bones, no muscles, no attitude. That is not what we mean a Greek meant by beauty. The same quality holds to a great extent of Greek poetry. Not, of course, that the artistic convention was the same, or at all similar for treating stone and for treating language. Greek poetry is statuesque in the sense that it depends greatly on its organic structure; it is not in the least so in the sense of being cold or colorless or stiff. But Greek poetry on the whole has a bareness and severity which disappoints a modern reader, accustomed as he is to lavish ornament and exaggeration at every turn. It has the same simplicity and straightforwardness as the art. The poet has something to say and he says it as well and truly as he can in the suitable style, and if you are not interested you are not. With some exceptions which explain themselves he does not play a thousand pretty tricks and antics on the way, so that you may forget the dullness of what he says in amusement at the draperies in which he wraps it.

But here comes an apparent difficulty. Greek poetry, we say, is very direct, very simple, very free from irrelevant ornament. And yet when we translate it into English and look at our translation, our main feeling, I think, is somehow the glory has gone: a thing that was high and lordly has become poor and mean. Any decent Greek scholar when he opens one of his ancient poets feels at once the presence of something lofty and rare—something like the atmosphere of *Paradise Lost*. But the language of *Paradise Lost* is elaborately twisted and embellished into loftiness and rarity; the language of the Greek poem is simple and direct. What does this mean?

I can only suppose that the normal language of Greek poetry is in itself in some sense sublime. Most critics accept this as an obvious fact, yet, if true, it is a very strange fact and worth thinking about. It depends partly on mere euphony: *Khaireis horon fos* is probably more beautiful in sound than "You rejoice to see the light" but euphony cannot be everything. The sound of a great deal of Greek poetry, either as we pronounce it, or as the ancients pronounced it, is to modern ears almost ugly. It depends partly, perhaps, on the actual structure of the Greek language: philologists tell us that, viewed as a specimen, it is in structure and growth and in power of expressing things, the most perfect language they know. And certainly one often finds that a thought can be expressed with ease and grace in Greek which becomes clumsy and involved in Latin, English, French or German. But neither of these causes goes, I think, to the root of the matter.

What is it that gives words their character and makes a style high or low? Obviously, their associations; the company they habitually keep in the minds of those who use them. A word which belongs to the language of bars and billiard saloons will become permeated by the normal standard of mind prevalent in such places; a word which suggests Milton or Carlyle will have the flavor of those men's minds about it. I, therefore, cannot resist the conclusion that, if the language of Greek poetry has, to those who know it intimately, this special

quality of keen austere beauty, it is because the minds of the poets who used that language were habitually toned to a higher level both of intensity and of nobility than ours. It is a finer language because it expresses the minds of finer men. By "finer men" I do not necessarily mean men who behaved better, either by our standards or by their

own; I mean men to whom the fine things of the world, sunrise and sea and stars and the love of man for man, and strife and the facing of evil for the sake of good, and even common things like meat and drink, and evil things like hate and terrors, had, as it were, a keener edge than they have for us and roused a swifter and a nobler reaction.

Gilbert Murray

To be continued

## TEN CENTURIES OF RUSSIAN ART

By PROFESSOR FRANCIS HAFFKINE SNOW, U. S. Naval Academy

I

THE importance of the study of Russian art in America is best known to those who have been able to follow the vagaries of foreign, and even Russian criticism in this domain. No art has engendered so many contradictory and sweeping opinions; no art has been more superficially considered. This is due to a multiplicity of causes—such, for example, as the violent reforms of Peter the Great, creating a chasm between Russian Art before and after Peter; the long reign thereby ushered in of Western European pseudo-classicism: the subsequent blind and passionate subservience of Art in Russia herself to the purposes of propaganda and didaxis: the inner conflict in the modern Russian soul between Occidental and Oriental traditions: the visionary and extreme views of Russian ideologists; the deep ignorance abroad of the complexity of the phenomena; the ignoring of the culture-historical fundamentals without which I believe no reliable criteria can be established.

The results of insufficient knowledge and, above all, of lack of comprehension of what Russian art really is may be seen in the fact, that, in a very recent book published both in England and the United States, the paintings exhibited in the Museum of Aleksandr III in Petrograd are condemned *en bloc*! The realistically remarkable landscapes of Shishkin, known and admired by every Russian, are called "insipid"; the magnificent paintings of the Black Sea by Aivasovsky are defined as "chilling"; large canvases by various famous Russian painters of the Russian Past, are said to be "weighted down" with the (beautiful) medieval costumes of tsars and boyars; the paintings of Semiradsky (spelled Semigradsky!) are condemned as huge and lifeless: Vereshchagin is dismissed in a single line as an assertive moralizer; all that magnificence and blaze and poetry of Russian Art contained in the great Petrograd Museum is contemptuously tossed aside as inferior to the collections of foreign painting in the Hermitage, collections of so much less interest and significance to the foreign student of Russian Art, who finds therein, as in Russia's literature and in her music, another and perhaps a richer aspect of the deep, brooding, radiant, mystical Russian Soul.

Or from another viewpoint, in a recent book dealing especially with the individuality of the Russian people by a Professor of Slavic in one of our largest American Universities, I find the extreme iconoclas-

tic view of Tolstoi championed, the rich development of Russian Art reduced to a scant half-dozen names—not all of the most famous; names of men who saw and who see in Russian Art the utilitarian and the didactic alone; the rest entirely ignored on the assumption that all art that does not bind itself to teach the universal brotherhood of man is idle and pernicious, a thing essentially aristocratic, exclusive and corrupt, which should be spurned.

So long as such colossal misconceptions prevail both in Europe and in our own land about the significance and the functions of Russian Art, both of the past and of the present, so long will it be the duty of those who love and admire one of the most brilliantly beautiful and above all the most spiritual artistic creations of the Russian genius to challenge, to defend and to illuminate.

The modern conception of painting is so comprehensive and in Russia so recent<sup>1</sup> that many critics, Russian as well as German, prefer to focus on the strictly modern painters. This method, preëminently in the case of Russia, seems based on an incorrect critical principle; and I believe that it may produce extremely inaccurate and misleading results.

It is said, for instance, that the modern Russian School of Art has absolutely no relation to the Old Russian tradition. This, as will be shown below, is not only psychologically but factively erroneous; and those who hold this wholly arbitrary theory must necessarily remain blind to one of the most important features of modern Russian painting, I mean its obstinate and incurable reversion to the Old Russian religious mood.

What is needed in the study of Russian Art is above all *Synthesis*, the combination of an historical with an interpretative method. The usually isolated facts of the existence of an Old Russian Art of high æsthetic and decorative value, the unmistakable perpetuation of the Byzantine tradition in religious painting; the development of a distinctive Russian style in architecture; the crossing of the Western and the Eastern artistic currents; the almost chem-

<sup>1</sup>Note 1.—The history of art is recent in Russia herself. Sergiei Diaghilev, founder of the *Mir Iskusstva*, and that brilliant Russian scholar and painter Igor Grabar, in his projected nine-volume history of Russian art with a thousand illustrations, were pioneers in a new field. Benois did but follow on their tracks.